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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003587

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV KJUS KDEM SOCI SCUL IZ

SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: LVIN EDITOR DETAILS KDP ATTEMPT TO KILL HIM

REF: BAGHDAD 2815

Classified By: RRT Erbil Regional Coordinator Lucy Tamlyn for Reasons 1
.4 (b,d)

This is an Erbil RRT reporting cable.

Summary

¶1. (C) During a November 5 meeting with Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq Krajeski, Sulaimaniya-based Lvin Magazine Editor-in-Chief Ahmad Mira provided details on what he said was a recent attempt by the KDP to kill him. Mira explained that PUK Asayeesh officers told him they arrested two men September 29 in Sulaimaniyah who confessed to being sent there to kill Mira. The PUK Asayeesh showed Mira the videotaped confessions and said they were "80 percent sure" that the men were agents of the KDP's intelligence service, the Parastin, which is headed by President Barzani's son, Masroor. Mira asserted that he had been targeted for assassination by the KDP not for reporting on corruption but for sanctioning reporting critical of revered Barzani clan patriarch Mulla Mustafa. Mira asked Ambassador Krajeski to raise the Parastin attempt to kill him with senior KRG officials, including Masroor. "We need you to show them a Red Card," Mira said. Mira also reiterated his claim that the Parastin was involved in the murder of Lvin reporter Soran Hama (reftel). Mira related to S/A Krajeski that KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani called him November 1 to advise that Hama's killers had been caught and that "some people in the KDP were involved." End summary.

Lvin Editor Details Attempted Hit

¶2. (SBU) In a meeting immediately prior to a November 5 on-the-record interview in Erbil with S/A Tom Krajeski, Lvin Magazine Editor-in-Chief Ahmad Mira provided details on what he said was a Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) attempt to kill him in late September. Lvin is the most influential of the Kurdistan Region's six independent media outlets. Mira frequently receives death threats and takes them seriously, given that the magazine's Kirkuk-based reporter, Soran Hama, was gunned down in July after writing about the involvement in a lucrative Kirkuk prostitution ring of officers from the KDP's Asayeesh, or internal intelligence/law enforcement agency.

PUK Asayeesh Show Mira Taped Confessions

¶3. (C) Asking that this information not be made public, Mira explained that the Sulaimaniyah-based Asayeesh (affiliated with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party that controls Sulaimaniyah) told him that they arrested two men on September 29 who confessed to being sent to Sulaimaniyah to kill Mira. Mira said the PUK Asayeesh showed him the

videotaped confessions and said they were "80 percent sure" that the two men were agents of the KDP intelligence service, the Parastin, which is headed by President Barzani's son, Masroor. Mira commented that after viewing the confessions, he was "90 percent sure" that the men were Parastin agents.

Mira: Targeted for "Criticizing "God"

14. (SBU) In response to a question from S/A Krajeski, Mira said he had been targeted for assassination by the KDP not because Lvin has reported on KDP corruption but because he committed a more grievous sin: he sanctioned Lvin reporting critical of revered Barzani clan patriarch Mulla Mustafa, the father of current KRG President Masoud Barzani. Mira agreed with S/A Krajeski's observation that, for the Barzanis, criticizing Mulla Mustafa was akin to "criticizing God."

"Please Show Them A Red Card"

15. (SBU) Mira asked Ambassador Krajeski to raise the Parastin attempt to kill him with senior KRG officials, including Masroor. "We need you to show them a Red Card," Mira grimly joked. Mira also said it was okay to discuss the incident with the Sulaimaniya Asayeesh and senior PUK officials, though he claimed that it would do little good because "they are all afraid of the Parastin." Ambassador Krajeski closed the private discussion by stressing that he has defended, and will continue to defend, Lvin's right and duty to report in an independent manner. (Comment: Granting the on-the-record briefing is one element of our strategy to convey to KRG

BAGHDAD 00003587 002 OF 002

leadership the seriousness with which we view these issues. End comment) Freedom of the press, he emphasized, is critical to the development of democracy in the Kurdistan Region. Krajeski noted that Lvin's no-holds-barred reporting was a "dangerous business" and added that the Kurdistan Region needed "more Lvins." Mira agreed, but observed that, for the moment, "we are alone."

Progress in the Soran Hama Case?

16. (C) Echoing his previous assertions (reftel), Mira claimed that the Parastin was also involved in the Soran Hama killing. He related that KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani called him November 1 to advise that Hama's killers had been caught and that "some people in the KDP were involved." Mira also noted that Awene newspaper reported on November 4 that three people had been arrested in Kirkuk in connection with Hama's murder. All three, he noted, were from the same hometown (Raniya, outside of Sulimaniyah) as the Kirkuk Parastin Chief. Mira asserted that the three men would likely not stand trial, but would instead be released under a confidential provision of the 2007 KDP-PUK Strategic Agreement.

Comment

17. (C) We have not yet seen the evidence of KRG complicity in either of the two plots that Mira described, and Masroor Barzani emphatically denies Parastin involvement. That said, if confirmed, Prime Minister Barzani's reported admission of some level of KDP culpability in the Soran Hama killing would be a significant development. We understand from Mira that PM Barzani contacted Mira again after S/A Krajeski raised the matter of the recent threats with External Relations Director Fallah Mustafa. PM Barzani's motives could be to undercut his political rival Masroor Barzani or to ensure that the United States hears what he believes we want to hear concerning press freedom. We need to investigate further with officials in Erbil and Sulimaniyah to come to a

definitive conclusion.

¶ 8. (C) Notwithstanding his contact with Mira, PM Barzani does not control the KRG's security services and exerts little influence over PUK Assayish in Sulimaniyah. Given the explosiveness of the allegations, we doubt PUK Assayish will take aggressive action on this case without international pressure. It is not clear what will happen to those detained in Sulimaniyah, for example. Absent a prosecution of the alleged perpetrators, Iraqis may not learn who ordered the Hama murder or attempted plot against Mira.

¶ 9. (C) RRT Erbil and S/A Krajeski will continue to raise with Masroor and other key KRG officials the issue of intimidation and harassment of the independent media. To help counter KRG claims that independent media outlets have "poorly trained" and "unprofessional" reporters, RRT Erbil will continue to send independent journalists to training run by reputable NGOs like the Institute for War and Peace Reporting and develop QRF projects to help raise the professional standards of all journalists in the Kurdistan Region. End comment.

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